

New Democracy Foundation research proposal 2015

Decisiveness, impact and influence of deliberative democracy processes: is there a simple relationship?

Principal Researcher: Dr A. Wendy Russell

Summary

This research project will consider *impact*, and its connection to *decisiveness* and *influence*, in the context of deliberative democracy processes and systems. I will take a theoretical approach to developing an impact typology, drawing on existing literature from deliberative democracy and other relevant areas. I will then take an empirical and interpretive approach to exploring impact and influence in practice by considering a range of new Democracy Foundation (nDF) processes. This should provide a tool for use in the planning and evaluation of deliberative innovations and insights about the connections between context and impact relevant to a reform agenda.

Research theme, innovation and expected contribution

One of the key criteria for judging the quality of deliberative processes is *impact*. Yet impact is a multi-faceted and contested concept: it has been described in terms of both consequence (processes need to make a difference) and decisiveness (they need to have an impact on decision-making) (Dryzek, 2009). Consequence is potentially a broader and longer-term notion than decisiveness. Impact in these terms could include, for example, agenda setting, capacity building, conflict resolution or informing debates (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006; Decker & Ladikas, 2004). However, decisiveness can refer to direct impact on a decision that is the focus of the deliberation (a 'decision moment') or to a more general influence on collective decision-making (Dryzek, 2009); and it can also be empowered (political sponsors are committed to the outcome) or advisory (the outcome provides input to the decision-making process).

These distinctions are relevant in the context of deliberative systems, in which deliberative processes have a diversity of potential roles and impacts interacting to create more deliberative and democratic systems (Dryzek 2010; Mansbridge et al., 2012). To achieve systemic effects, deliberative democracy must gain 'traction' as participants, the wider public and particularly those with political power, experience and value it. As this is an important aspect of a reform agenda, it may be important to distinguish *impact* – the substantive difference that a deliberative process makes, from *influence* – the extent to which it convinces key people, particularly decision makers and political leaders, that deliberative democracy is a good idea. There is likely to be tension between impact and influence at times, which deserves exploration.

This project will contribute to clarifying these key concepts: impact, decisiveness and influence, and will make a novel contribution in exploring relationships between them empirically using nDF cases, with a particular focus on impact in relation to a reform agenda.

Research questions and aims

If we distinguish influence and impact, and see decisiveness as a specific type of impact, a number of questions emerge. What types of impact have most influence, and under what conditions? Can positive impacts have negative influences? For example, given that decisiveness raises the political stakes of deliberative processes, are there situations in which

decisiveness ‘turns up the heat’ on decision makers to such an extent that they lose appetite for deliberative democracy in general? How do these relationships differ in different contexts (eg where deliberative democracy is emergent vs well embedded; at local vs state vs national levels, as political stakes get higher)? What are the implications for a reform agenda?

This research aims to answer these questions and develop clearer descriptions of impact, decisiveness and influence in the context of deliberative democracy. I aim to develop and test an impact typology and investigate relationships between these concepts, and between impact and context, empirically by studying nDF cases.

Design and methodology

The terms impact and influence are used extensively and often imprecisely in the literature and practice of deliberative democracy. They are very much tied up with what people think deliberative democracy is for. I will therefore take a grounded, interpretive approach to developing more systematic and useful descriptions of these concepts, and to using these descriptions to explore their relationships empirically drawing on nDF projects, including a range of projects at different levels (local, state and national), with a range of impacts and decisiveness, including those empowered around a particular decision (e.g. SA drainage infrastructure) or set of decisions (e.g. City of Melbourne People’s Panel), those with advisory roles (e.g. Noosa Community Jury, Marrickville Infrastructure Jury), and those not directly connected to political decision-making (e.g. the Citizens’ Parliament).

The research will begin with an exploration of the range of impacts, including but going beyond decisiveness and including longitudinal impacts, that deliberative processes may have and developing a typology to describe them. I will take as a starting point the typology developed by Goodin and Dryzek (2006), and will consider other relevant deliberative democracy theory and empirical literature, and other areas such as impact assessment and technology assessment (Decker & Ladikas, 2004). A draft typology will be developed and then tested in the context of nDF processes.

I will use the impact typology and take an iterative approach to explore the relationships between impact, decisiveness and influence by:

- analysing written documents from nDF processes,
- investigating other sources for impacts and influences (media, policy documents, scanning political and public debates), and
- interviewing a range of key people, including decision makers, associated with nDF processes, past and present.

The interviews will be semi-structured, and conducted in person where possible or by phone. Preference will be given to face-to-face interviews, given the interpretive approach to be used, and the potential sensitivity of the topic in relation to political decision-making. Where appropriate, interviews may be conducted with small groups. A high standard of research ethics will be applied, and appropriate documentation will be provided to participants¹. Interviews will be analysed qualitatively, taking an interpretive approach to test the impact typology, and to qualitatively explore understandings of, and relationships between, decisiveness, impact and influence.

¹ As an independent scholar, I am not required to gain formal research ethics clearance but if nDF has particular requirements or would prefer clearance through a university research ethics procedure, I’m happy to comply.

Timeline and communication

The research will be conducted over a year (Aug 2015 – Jul 2016).

Stage	Details	Deliverables	Date
1	Review of relevant literature Presentation to the Aus Political Science Ass'n conference, Sept Development of impact typology	Draft impact typology	November 2015
2	Interviews to test typology and explore relationships Analysis of nDF cases	Impact typology Research paper	July 2015

The impact typology will be made available as a research and practice tool through the nDF website and other forums (LinkedIn groups, NCDD).

A research paper will be written, and targeted to an open access journal such as the *Journal of Public Deliberation*. A popular version of the paper will be prepared for submission to *The Conversation* and insights will be shared via blogs (e.g. IGPA) and discussion groups (e.g. LinkedIn).

Research Team

Principal researcher:

Dr A. Wendy Russell

Wendy Russell is currently director of Double Arrow Consulting, a Canberra business specialising in deliberative engagement. She previously (2010-13) worked in the National Enabling Technologies Strategy – Public Awareness and Community Engagement program of the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. In this role, she managed the development, through co-design with a multi-stakeholder group, of the Science & Technology Engagement Pathways (STEP) community engagement framework and its implementation in a series of engagements called *STEP into the Future*.

Dr Russell is currently ACT regional coordinator for the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), an associate of the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance, University of Canberra, and a sessional academic at the Centre for the Public Awareness of Science, ANU. Previously, she was Senior Lecturer in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Wollongong, where she researched social aspects of biotechnology, transdisciplinary inquiry, and technology assessment.

With her ongoing research experience and track record (over 20 refereed publications and 400 citations; see attached CV), Dr Russell has the required research skills to undertake this research project. Her practice experience, particularly in federal government, provides an understanding of practice and policy contexts and language, and motivation to provide a report that is accessible and useful beyond academia.

Research and practice advisors:

Prof. John Dryzek, Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance, University of Canberra

Ms Gail Fairlamb, Director of Strategic Engagement and Communications, South Australian Department of the Premier and Cabinet

John Dryzek and Gail Fairlamb will provide pro bono advice and peer review to the project and connections to deliberative democracy theory and practice. Prof Dryzek, who is a pre-eminent researcher in this field internationally, will help to connect the impact work with existing theory and to generally connect the project with insights emerging about deliberative systems. Ms Fairlamb, with her extensive experience and positioning in relation to deliberative democracy innovation, will assist in grounding the empirical work, particularly in the context of South Australia, which will provide an important context for studying both impact and influence, given the uptake of deliberative democracy there. She will also help to ensure that the research findings have policy and practice relevance.

Budget and justification (consultancy elements to be done by Wendy Russell)

Project components	Amount and rate	Estimated cost
Stage 1: Literature review and impact typology		
Desktop review, development of draft typology	3 days @ \$1000	\$3000
Stage 2: Testing typology and analysis of relationships		
Semi-structured interviews, in person and by phone (approx. 15 @ 1 hr)	3 days @ \$1000	\$3000
Travel Return trips to e.g. Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide incl flights, ground transport, budget accom'n	~3 interstate trips	\$2500
Analysis of interviews	6 days @ \$1000	\$6000
Analysis of nDF cases from written documents, media reports and other sources	4 days @ \$1000	\$4000
Revision of typology, analysis of impact relationships, preparation of research paper	4 days @ \$1000	\$4000
Total cost estimate		\$22,500
GST @ 10%		\$2250
TOTAL		\$24,750

Note: the principal researcher has access to academic and professional literature through affiliations.

References

Decker, M., & Ladikas, M. (Eds.). (2004). *Bridges Between Science, Society and Policy: Technology Assessment—Methods and Impacts*. Berlin: Springer.

Dryzek, J.S. (2009) Democratization as Deliberative Capacity Building. *Comparative Political Studies*, 42 (11):1379-1402.

Dryzek, J.S. (2010) *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Goodin, R.E. & Dryzek, J.S. (2006) Deliberative Impacts: The Macro-Political Uptake of Mini-Publics. *Politics & Society*, 34 (2): 219-244.